

## **Risk Factors and Protective Factors for Considering Risk of School Failure**

Risk Factors
--------------

Many of the risk factors that make it likely that youth will engage in risky behaviors are the opposite of the protective factors that make it likely that a teen will not engage in such behaviors. For example, one risk factor is family management problems. If parents fail to set standards for their teen's behavior, it increases the likelihood that the teen will engage in substance abuse or delinquent behavior. Conversely, a protective factor is effective parenting. If parents consistently provide both nurturing and structure, it increases the likelihood that a teen will not get involved with substance abuse or delinquent behavior and will become involved in positive activities.

Exposure to risk factors in the relative absence of protective factors dramatically increases the likelihood that a young person will engage in problem behaviors. The most effective approach for improving young people's lives is to reduce risk factors while increasing protective factors in all of the areas that touch their lives.

Risk factors function in a cumulative fashion; that is, the greater the number of risk factors, the greater the likelihood that youth will engage in delinquent or other risky behavior. There is also evidence that problem behaviors associated with risk factors tend to cluster. For example, delinquency and violence cluster with other problems, such as drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and school misbehavior.

*Risk factors that predict future risky behaviors by youth are shown below:*

**Individual**

- Antisocial behavior and alienation/delinquent beliefs/general delinquency involvement/drug dealing
- Gun possession/illegal gun ownership/carrying
- Teen parenthood
- Favorable attitudes toward drug use/early onset of AOD use/alcohol/drug use
- Early onset of aggression/violence
- Intellectual and/or development disabilities
- Victimization and exposure to violence
- Poor refusal skills
- Life stressors
- Early sexual involvement
- Mental disorder/mental health problem

**Family**

- Family history of problem behavior/parent criminality
- Family management problems/poor parental supervision and/or monitoring
- Poor family attachment/bonding
- Child victimization and maltreatment
- Pattern of high family conflict
- Family violence
- Having a young mother
- Broken home
- Sibling antisocial behavior
- Family transitions
- Parental use of physical punishment/harsh and/or erratic discipline practices
- Low parent education level/illiteracy
- Maternal depression

**School**

- Low academic achievement
- Negative attitude toward school/low bonding/low school attachment/commitment to school
- Truancy/frequent absences
- Suspension
- Dropping out of school
- Inadequate school climate/poorly organized and functioning schools/negative labeling by teachers
- Identified as learning disabled
- Frequent school transitions

**Peer**

- Gang involvement/gang membership
- Peer ATOD use
- Association with delinquent/aggressive peers
- Peer rejection

**Community**

- Availability/use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs in neighborhood
- Availability of firearms
- High-crime neighborhood
- Community instability
- Low community attachment
- Economic deprivation/poverty/residence in a disadvantaged neighborhood
- Neighborhood youth in trouble
- Feeling unsafe in the neighborhood
- Social and physical disorder/disorganized neighborhood

## Protective Factors

Researchers know less about protective factors than they do about risk factors because fewer studies have been done in this area. However, they believe protective factors operate in three ways.

\*First, they may serve to buffer risk factors, providing a cushion against negative effects.

\*Second, they may interrupt the processes through which risk factors operate. For example, a community program that helps families learn conflict resolution may interrupt a chain of risk factors that lead youth from negative family environments to associate with delinquent peers. \*Third, protective factors may prevent the initial occurrence of a risk factor, such as child abuse.

For example, infants and young children who are easy-going may be protected from abuse by eliciting positive, rather than frustrated, responses from their parents and caregivers. Recent scientific studies have shown that community resources also can influence individual teenagers' positive traits. For example, young people are more likely to be a part of youth organizations and sports teams if their parents perceive that the community is safe and that it has good neighborhood and city services (such as police and fire protection or trash pickup). Similarly, youth are more apt to be exposed to good adult role models other than their parents when communities have informal sources of adult supervision, when there is a strong sense of community, when neighborhoods are perceived to be safe, and when neighborhood and city services are functioning.

*Protective factors that protect youth against delinquency and substance abuse are shown below:*

**Individual**

- Positive/resilient temperament
- Religiosity/valuing involvement in organized religious activities
- Social competencies and problem-solving skills
- Perception of social support from adults and peers
- Healthy sense of self
- Positive expectations/optimism for the future
- High expectations

**Family**

- Good relationships with parents/bonding or attachment to family
- Opportunities and reward for pro-social family involvement
- Having a stable family
- High family expectations

**School**

- School motivation/positive attitude toward school
- Student bonding and connectedness (attachment to teachers, belief, commitment)
- Academic achievement/reading ability and mathematics skills
- Opportunities and rewards for pro-social school involvement
- High-quality schools/clear standards and rules
- High expectations of students
- Presence and involvement of caring, supportive adults

**Peer**

- Involvement with positive peer group activities and norms
- Good relationship with peers
- Parental approval of friends

**Community**

- Economically sustainable/stable communities
- Safe and health-promoting environment/supportive law enforcement presence
- Positive social norms
- Opportunities and rewards for pro-social community involvement/availability of neighborhood resources
- High community expectations
- Neighborhood/social cohesion

[Bibliography for Research on Risk and Protective Factors](#)

This information was pulled from the Helping America's Youth website, August 2008.

<http://guide.helpingamericasyouth.gov/programtool-factors.cfm>